

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, ranking members Kissel and Fishbein and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee:

I am from Westport and a supporter of CT Against Gun Violence. I am a 17 years old student and I'm actively involved in gun safety within my community, especially as a member of the Students Demand Action organization. I am submitting this testimony in Support of HB-6355, An Act Concerning Risk Protection Orders.

This legislation is crucial for ensuring safety within our community. As a father of six, it is scary to think about the possibilities of gun violence in my children's school. It's something you can never plan for, which is the scariest thing. This bill could save so many lives and provide reassurance for so many students and parents.

Connecticut was the first state in the nation to pass an Extreme Risk Protection Order law, in 1999. It offers a means of last resort to temporarily remove firearms from individuals judged to be at risk of imminent harm to themselves or others. It has been proven to prevent firearm suicide and stop mass shootings. It is now time to strengthen the law so that it works harder to prevent gun violence. In particular, when the protection order expires, it should be a requirement that the subject is no longer at risk of violence before the firearms are returned. That is not the case now.

Many opponents of the bill claim that ERPOs lack due process protections and are abused by family members. Neither of these is true. An ex parte process is used that is virtually the same as the one used for issuing domestic violence restraining orders and the subject is entitled to a court hearing, presided over by a Judge, before the order is extended beyond 14 days. There is no evidence that the process is used to harass gun owners; judges are required to have clear and convincing evidence to issue final risk protection orders.

Since there are often warning signs preceding violent or suicidal behavior this last-resort temporary removal measure with due process protections is an effective tool for reducing gun violence. Because firearm suicide accounts for up to two-thirds of gun deaths and is the second leading cause of suicide in Connecticut, there is an urgent need to strengthen our ERPO law to help it save more lives.

I ask that you favorably report HB-6355 out of committee so that the General Assembly can vote to strengthen our Extreme Risk Protection law so that it works harder to prevent firearm suicide and homicide. Thank you so much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Mark Maidique  
Westport, CT